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ABSTRACT

University and school-based members of the League of Professional Schools, a collaborative formed to support school renewal, engage in disciplined inquiry on the effects of this school/university collaborative on life in member schools. Essentially, the League conducts action research on action research. The League and its definition of schoolwide research are described. Some general tendencies that have been noted in the conduct of research among member schools are reviewed, as is support provided to members by the League. Successes and difficulties in the conduct of the League's research are reviewed, and reflections on the process are presented. Currently, the League includes 60 elementary and secondary schools, with university participation through the University of Georgia. The League is a network held together by common goals, among which are continued cycles of action research. An analysis of 47 action programs of member schools finds 4 areas of success in the collaborative efforts: (1) desirable process outcomes for staff; (2) desirable process outcomes for students; (3) desirable product outcomes for staff; and (4) desirable product outcomes for students. The League is aware that action research is hard work, but it is clear that member schools are recognizing its value and learning how to conduct it effectively. An appendix describes key activities and resources of the League. Contains 72 references. (SLD)

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ISSUES AND DILEMMAS OF ACTION RESEARCH IN THE LEAGUE OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

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A paper presented to the Annual Meeting
of the American Educational Research Association

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ISSUES AND DILEMMAS OF ACTION RESEARCH IN THE LEAGUE OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

by Emily F. Calhoun and Carl D. Glickman

Trying to live what we profess! University and school-based members of the League of Professional Schools engage in disciplined inquiry on the effects of this school/university collaborative on life in member schools. Essentially, we conduct action research on action research.

We have three primary audiences for the results of action research: One is the League staff and the Governing Board of the League. Members of these two groups use the results 1) to select the content for future League meetings, services to schools, and the nature and types of information, examples, and processes selected for sharing across League schools and 2) to better understand the nature, difficulties, and possibilities of network/collaboration between schools and universities. Two is the member schools, for whom we are trying to model the action research process. And, three is the larger professional community, especially those persons interested in studying the action research process and how to make it more effective.

During the past four years, we have learned much at the school level and at the university level about initiating collective disciplined inquiry in public schools. In this paper, we report just one segment of a larger effort to assess the progress of the League on its three major goals: shared governance, a collective focus on student learning, and schoolwide action research. We focus on the successes, difficulties, and concerns that arise as school staff learn to use on-site information and information from the literature to select collective actions for implementation and assess the effects of these actions on student learning.

The format of our presentation is as follows. First, we share a brief description of the League of Professional Schools and our operational definition of schoolwide action research. Second, we share some general "tendencies we have noticed" as schools implement or fail to implement action research. Third, is a brief description of the support provided to member schools through their affiliation with the League. Fourth, we share some successes from member schools; fifth, some difficulties in conducting and in supporting action research; and sixth, our reflections at this point in time.

What is the League of Professional Schools?

The League of Professional Schools is a school/university collaborative formed to support school renewal. Currently, the League includes 60 elementary and secondary

schools in Georgia, with university participation provided through the Program for School Improvement at the University of Georgia. Twenty-two of these 60 schools have been League members for three full years; eighteen for two years; and twenty for one year.

Basically, the League is a network held together by common goals. Schools volunteer to join. Schools interested in affiliating with the League send a team that includes building administrators, teachers, and if the team wishes, representatives from their district office, to a two-day orientation and planning workshop. The primary tasks of workshop participants are to gather information about shared governance, enhanced education, and action research as supported by the League. If, after this workshop, team members believe that affiliation with the League can help their school move forward, they take this information back to the staff at their school.

Acceptance into the League is contingent upon having 80% of the faculty vote by secret ballot to join and having the approval of the appropriate school district officials. In their letter of application for membership, these schools sign a commitment to collect data to assess progress on their initiative(s). This application or commitment letter specifies activities League staff agree to provide and activities schools agree to pursue, e.g. shared governance, initiatives that promote student learning, and action research.

Shared governance or democratic decision making is used to tap the collective wisdom resident on-site in any school and the collective energy and resocialization needed to bring about major school change. An emphasis on student learning and instruction is used because "teaching" is the major work of the school. And action research is critical in school renewal in order to know the current status of progress on goals, to make more informed, better decisions, to direct action to optimum possibilities for goal attainment, to model this problem-solving approach to life as a normal way of business in schools both for the benefit of professionals living there and students required to be there. Of these three, shared governance structures move most swiftly into place, followed by the identification of a collective goal focused on students, with action research being developed more gradually.

All school teams receive five basic services through membership in the League: (a) four days of meetings during each membership year, generally focused on shared decision-making, school member descriptions of progress, and action research; (b) an Information Retrieval System that provides information relevant to schoolwide goals; (c) a biannual network exchange newsletter; (d) telephone consultations with League staff; and (e) a one-day, on-site visit by a facilitator. Optional services have included summer institutes on team building (no fee) and additional on-site consultations (for an additional cost). Representatives from the schools govern the League; they determine the services that are

provided, develop policies, and set membership fees. (The school fee for joining the League has remained at $1000.00 per school year for four years.) Basically, the support provided to our schools is "heavy" in its networking and collaboration with school teams together, but very "light" in amount of time and extent of on-site assistance to individual schools. The amount of service provided, from telephone consultations to use of the Information Retrieval System, is at the discretion of each school facilitator team or leadership team. As could be expected in a self-governing system, some schools seek more information and assistance than others.

The Schools

Of the 60 school members in 1992-93, there were 37 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, and 13 high schools. Ten of the schools were in urban settings, 27 in suburban, and 23 in rural. Twenty-two schools had 10% or fewer students on free and reduced lunch; 9 schools had 11%-25%; 17 had 26%-50%; 9 had 51%-75%; and 3 with over 75%. Minority populations ranged from 25 schools with less than 10% minority student enrollment; 8 with 11%-25%; 16 with 26%-50%; 7 with 51%-75%; and 4 with over 75%. The overall range for setting, percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunches, and percentages of minority students is similar to the ranges for Georgia as a whole.

In size of population of elementary schools, 3 schools had less than 250 students; 10 had between 251 and 500; 14 between 501 and 800; 9 had between 801 and 1200; 1 school had over 1200. For the ten middle schools, 4 had student populations of 600 to 800; 5 had between 801 and 1000 students; and 1 school had over 1000. For high schools, 3 had student populations between 300 and 500; 0 schools had between 501 and 1100; 8 schools had populations between 1100 and 1500; and 1 school had over 1500 students. Regionally, the League includes schools from north, central, and south Georgia.

What is Schoolwide Action Research?

Within the League, the category of action research promoted matches Lewin's (1947, 1948) action-research-for-social-change framework and is focused on school improvement (Corey, 1953). School faculties are encouraged to select an area or problem of collective interest; collect, organize, and interpret on-site data related to this area of interest; and take action based on this information. Each faculty determines the questions it wishes to explore about the effects of the instructional program on students. The methodology used by the faculty in studying the school site and the effects of actions taken may be quantitative and as simple as counting instances, qualitative and as complex as multi-year case studies, or a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of investigation and exploration.

Data collection, organization, and interpretation are essentials of the action-research process as diagnoses of problems are made and actions are taken. These processes are repeated, resulting in a cyclical pattern and the development of a formative evaluation system that examines the effects of schoolwide action(s) taken. To support major initiatives and to benefit from the collective wisdom of other educators and institutions, schoolwide action research in this framework includes a study of the available professional literature in order to combine its information with the results of on-site data to determine optimum actions to employ in seeking commonly valued goals.

The effect of continued cycles of action research is the development of a community similar to the model Schaefer (1966) described in his essay on the "School as the Center of Inquiry," where group investigation procedures become a way of life. The formal collection of data, followed by group analysis and interpretation, may move the school community forward in the path it has elected to follow. This regular confrontation with data as a progress marker can function as "choice points" for the organization, as both "noticing choice" and "doing choice." Paraphrasing Weick on the role of choice in the organizing process, the school community ask itself "Knowing what we know now, should we notice something we did not notice before and ignore something we noticed before?" and "Knowing what we know now, should we act differently?" From baseline data to regular checks on progress, League members face a series of choice points for unfreezing the status quo and permitting action to change the experience of schooling.

"Temporary Insights and Tendencies Noticed"

In previous papers (Calhoun, 1991, 1992; Hensley, Calhoun, and Glickman, 1992), we presented descriptions of the action research activities of schools in their first and second year of membership in the League of Professional Schools. Forty of those forty-five schools have continued and been joined by 20 others during this third year. In this section, we share some of the "tendencies noticed" as school faculties addressed the issue of conducting schoolwide action research. Many of the items listed below were noticed by school-based and/or university participants the first year, articulated in the second year, and continued to exist in this last year. These items that relate to process and task tendencies among our schools were derived from our action research on the League. Our focus for action research on the League as a unit studies the progression of League schools toward the utilization of data to examine the health of their schools, to generate initiatives to improve the learning of students in their schools, to utilize formative evaluation procedures in assessing the results of those initiatives, and to take action based on the results of their information.

So, as members of a school/university collaborative program, what have we learned about schoolwide action research? After three years of supporting schools as they seek to use collective disciplined inquiry to attain schoolwide goals, **the profound knowledge that persevering school-based participants and university participants agree on can be summarized succinctly**:

General Observations

-Schoolwide action research is hard work!

-Schoolwide action research is messy!

-Data collection and analysis produces anxiety or resistance among some staff members the closer it moves to regular, formative assessment of the effects of instruction.

-Collective study and data use that are focused directly on student learning are unnatural behaviors in many schools.

-Communication improves within the school, from teacher to teacher and between teachers and administrators.

Items that have less universal agreement across school and university participants, but have much data to support them across school sites:

Social Tendencies We Are Noticing

-A core group of facilitators who are willing to accept leadership of their colleagues appears to be essential for supporting schoolwide action research. The process appears to be expedited when these facilitators study the action research process as well as lead the data collection and study with their colleagues. Basically, these facilitators comprise a within-school leadership group. These facilitator leaders communicate that they are in the process of learning, rather than people who "have solutions" and are trying to "get their way."

-Active administrator participation, not just acceptance or approval, appears to be an important component in facilitating the action research process. The school administrators become action-researchers.

-Teacher and administrator "buy in" to shared decision-making and the selection of a common initiative are essential beginnings. They do not make the task of learning action research easy or the changes in the social interactions less stressful. That 80 percent of the faculty vote to engage in the process represents commitment, but much new learning and work to develop collegiality is still necessary.

-External technical assistance is generally necessary to help schools move forward in schoolwide action research. External helpers provide perspective and help persons expand their repertoire of skills and knowledge.

-Seeking greater inclusion of participants in schoolwide decision-making and data use appears to be a task that continues for several years for facilitator teams in schools that are making steady progress in implementing action research. This inclusion involves both an increase in numbers of participants and often an increase in the role groups represented (for example, including paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, clerical support staff, parents, students, community members in the collective study).

Technical or Task Tendencies We Are Noticing

-Faculties need to learn to focus directly on the collective study of student learning. That teachers as individuals are accustomed to studying student learning in the classes they teach does not ensure that the faculty as a group knows how to select areas for collective study and agree on common techniques for doing so.

-Structured routines are needed to ensure collective discussion and inquiry. For example, arranging time for data organization, faculty study of this on-site data and of relevant literature, and the study of options to pursue.

-Perceptual data, especially surveys, followed by standardized test scores are the most common data sources identified for use. Learning to select, develop, and use precise formative measures across classrooms is new to many persons.

-Conceptual understanding of the action research process and why it is useful appears to be an essential part of helping school faculties sustain their efforts. Faculties need to know at the outset that they will need to study the process.

-Schoolwide collection and use of data for formative assessment of progress involves change in the cultures of most schools.

League Activities To Support Action Research

The major changes made to support schools in conducting action research during the course of these four years from 1990 through 1993, and rapidly accelerating now, has been to gradually provide more time during League meetings, more structure in materials shared, and more technical assistance for schools as they learn to conduct schoolwide action research. Data (primarily surveys and school team generated documents) were collected at every League meeting and used to refine or select services, identify sessions for future meetings, identify materials that needed to be created or provided, identify items that needed to be included in the League newsletter, and take "loose readings" of where the schools were making progress and where they were getting stuck.

Please see the Appendix for a brief description of key activities and resources provided by the League to support school-based action research. School, district office, or university personnel considering schoolwide action research or collective inquiry as an avenue to school renewal may find this description of interest.

Until February of 1993 (almost three full years), all sessions focusing on schoolwide action research had been optional breakout sessions or workshops. Based on the data gathered from the current 60 League schools, representing 37 school districts in Georgia, schoolwide action research has been difficult to implement without the acquisition of knowledge and new skills and a plan for implementation. Action research is becoming an integral part of the decision-making process in nearly quarter of our member schools. Another quarter of member schools recognize the value of action research and have begun to use it to some extent. The remainder of the schools are just in the beginning phases of the process, and some have not begun to use action research to study student learning. This information indicated that although action research is one of the three central premises of the League, and has been addressed through a number of optional sessions and through feedback to schools about their progress in action research through the facilitator letters and visits, a more comprehensive and systematic approach is necessary if schoolwide action research is to affect decisions made and actions taken in member schools.

In November of 1992, teachers from eleven League schools, representing six school districts, met with League staff members to plan how they could facilitate action research within the League. A decision was made to have a group of teachers and principals working in League schools that have had successful experiences with action research train themselves collaboratively to act as action research facilitators to other schools. This group will be called the Action Research Consortium. This group will develop itself, call upon experts, and eventually form a cadre of action research facilitators to assist other schools and in time

grow in numbers. Currently, League schools may call on the Consortium, at no expense, for a range of services. For example, a presentation introducing the school staff to action research, assistance with methods of data collection, assistance with the organization and presentation of data.

The theme of the **February 1993** meeting was action research. During this meeting, League schools were introduced to the Action Research Consortium described above and to the services that members of the Consortium would provide. **For the first time ever, at a regular meeting of the League of Professional schools, sessions on action research were conducted as part of the general session for all participants. Previous to this date, the only time the topic had been the focus for a general session had been at the Orientation and Planning Workshop prior to a school's affiliation with the League.** In sharp contrast to the theory, description, and process presentations conducted to build knowledge and application of shared governance within the school, the study of schoolwide action research had remained an optional session or an optional meeting for three years. While League staff encouraged members of school teams to divide their attendance among sessions being conducted at each meeting, there had been no structured time to bring the League participants as a learning community to the same level of understanding as they were acquiring in shared governance.

Is the League, through its decisions about areas of emphasis in terms of time and discussion and through its scheduling of optional sessions, in part, responsible for the current status of action research in League schools? Is action research simply more difficult to implement than shared decision making and instructional focus? Are school cultures less receptive to data collection and use than they are to the other two League goals? The answer to each of these questions is probably "in part, yes."

We--League staff members and associates and members of the Congress which governs the actions of the League--will continue to study the implementation of action research in member schools and its effectiveness for enhancing student learning. **More meeting time devoted to action research, more presentations by League schools, and more technical assistance provided to schools may help action research become an integral part of school life in more member schools.**

Analyses and Findings

In forming this description of the successes being experienced within League schools, we used 43 action plans generated by the schools for 1992-1993; 53 reports from the one-day, on-site facilitation visit; documents provided by schools, such as examples of how they

had organized data or reports on data use when such were available; and behavioral indicators of what schools do (for example, how many times they used the Information Retrieval System, participation in optional meetings, etc.). We acknowledge that most of these data sources are perceptual, including the 53 facilitator reports based on interviews with school personnel and visits in each school. In forming the description of the difficulties, we included surveys administered at each League meeting, the proceedings of the Action Research Ad Hoc Committee, and data reported in 1991 and 1992 (Calhoun).

Content analyses with results displayed in frequency distributions and simple counting of behaviors were used to generate the information in this section. No fancy statistics were used. As a research tool, content analyses can "provide knowledge, new insights, a representation of 'facts,' and a practical guide to action" (Krippendorf, p.21). For this study, the physical context units were the current action plans, the facilitator letters, and any documents provided by schools. The recording unit, using referential units, was any reference--word, phrase, sentence--to data being collected, to data being used, to assessment of progress, to study of professional literature, to the effects of action research or collective study on individuals or on the school as a community.

In previous papers reporting the status of action research in the League Calhoun 1991, 1992), specific questions were identified before analyzing data sources. For this paper, all documents were read; then all references listed above were recorded, tallied, and grouped by content of the statement and by the school's length of membership in the League. We have divided these findings into **successes and difficulties**.

There were four areas of success: desirable process outcomes for staff, desirable process outcomes for students, desirable product outcomes for staff, and desirable product outcomes for students.

Desirable Process Outcomes for Staff

The changes listed below are those that school-based participants identify for us repeatedly in interviews and written reports. Across the majority of League schools, interviewees expressed variations of the following points.

1) Staff members say they are more informed about their professional environment and about what students are experiencing.

2) Communication between adults in their school has improved primarily through shared governance but also through action research.

3) Staff members, especially the facilitators, feel supported by their affiliation with the League. They indicate that work with this university/school collaborative has enhanced them as individual professionals and is helping their school move forward.

4) Staff members, even in schools where action research has not started, express a belief that collective action research is a worthwhile activity.

5) Staff members are pleased to be working in a school engaged in shared decision-making and collective study. Even when things are difficult--such as new administration, problems in data collection, inability to achieve collective action--respondents indicate they had rather be at their school instead of a school that was not trying to operate democratically.

Evidence other than interview data indicates League schools continue to consider the three goals of the League worthy of pursuit and to value the support provided through its collaborative structure. The number of schools whose faculties have voted to rejoin the League each year are as follows: of the 24 schools that joined in 1990, 22 are still members (one elementary school and one high school did not continue beyond their first year); of the 21 schools that joined in 1991, 18 are still members (two middle schools and one high school did not continue beyond their first year).

Desirable Process Outcomes for Students

At least seventeen schools have a stronger collective focus on student learning than they did before affiliation with the League. Eight of these schools are third year schools, seven are second year schools, and two are first year schools. Most of these schools indicate they have a more student-centered approach and a more direct, collective focus on learning for all students. Many of these schools have implemented cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teamwork, and integrative or whole language activities to increase student engagement in learning, improve student achievement, and enhance social development.

Desirable Product Outcomes for Staff

Formal Assessment of Progress on the Collective Goal. Fourteen schools indicate schoolwide sharing and discussion of the information they are collecting. Six of these schools are third year schools; six are second year schools; and two are first year schools. Nine of these schools are among the seventeen focusing directly on student learning.

Desirable Product Outcomes for Students

Few League schools have measured the effects of their initiative on students. A few (five) that have focused on cooperative learning and/or the development of social skills have documented dramatic reductions in student discipline referrals and in suspensions. A few have documented increases in the numbers of books that students are reading outside of school and in the amount of writing that students are generating.

In addition to the seventeen schools that have a stronger focus on student learning, twelve schools are focusing on changes in instruction or curriculum. However, changes in students' social or cognitive learning and implementation data as a result of the collective focus on an innovation are not being documented or studied collectively.

An apologia. Here we will say almost the same thing that school-based League participants say to us when we ask them about the "effects of their instructional initiative."

We feel that more good things are happening for students. School-based League members indicate that their students are working together better, reading more, writing more and writing more skillfully, etc., but these changes are mostly not being documented. Individual teachers indicate that their students are performing better. However, at this point in time, we simply have very limited evidence of measured outcomes for students. Trying to find evidence of effects of a collective initiative on students--when the League's on-site assistance and support are so "light," when school faculties may decide to focus on any educational topic relevant to them, when the League's data collection is so uneven, and when many schools are not focusing their initiative or their data collection on students or in some cases are not collecting data of any sort--is a bit like trying to peer through layers of veils.

Difficulties Related to Action Research

The points shared in this section are a combination of difficulties and dilemmas noted by school-based participants and by university-based participants. Difficulties that continue to be voiced each year include finding the time to conduct action research; helping the entire staff understand the action research process; involving all faculty members, not just the action research facilitators or members of the school leadership team, in the action research process; reducing or eliminating feelings of discomfort or threat that some teachers experience when classroom data are collected; generating schoolwide ownership and responsibility for the data; and developing accurate measures of the school's initiative.

Stepping back, but aligned with, the concerns identified through surveys of individual schools and by the teacher representatives from eleven League schools and university staff who formed the Action Research Ad Hoc Committee, and drawing from our experience in having worked with over 100 schools as they engaged in some level of action research, we have **organized the difficulties we perceive in conducting action research in League schools into three areas** that directly affect the content and nature of our assistance to schools. These three areas relate to student learning, the action research process, and building a learning community.

Difficulties Related to the Focus on Student Learning. Three major difficulties relate to establishing a direct, collective focus on student learning: focusing on innovations that adults attain, focusing on indirect avenues, and collecting data solely about adult activities. Each statement below is expressed as a change that we believe will make action research for school renewal more productive:

1) Focus on student learning goals and break the habit of identifying innovations as student learning goals;

2) Focus on instruction to improve student learning and avoid the pull toward "safe" indirect changes that focus on issues external to instruction (schoolwide discipline, changes in curriculum materials, changes in adult communication, changes in schedules unaccompanied by changes in instruction); and

3) Collect data that assesses progress on student learning instead of recording information solely on the accomplishment of adult activities.

Difficulties Related to Understanding and Use of the Action Research Process. Lack of a conceptual framework to guide engagement in the action research process, simply not getting started with action research; not arranging time for collecting, organizing, analyzing data and discussing results; lack of involvement and responsibility by many staff members; not arranging time for collaborative study of pertinent literature--all reduce the likelihood of successful implementation of schoolwide action research. Each statement below is expressed as a change that we believe will make action research more productive:

1) Developing a broad-based understanding of action research by a core group on the staff and expanding this understanding to the majority of the staff;

2) Identifying or developing methods for assessing student learning schoolwide;

3) Arranging time and developing routines that allow for discussion of on-site data and study of relevant literature;

4) Using both on-site data and external information/resources as a data base to inform action;

5) Operating the action research process as collective inquiry instead of a series of adult activities to accomplish; and

6) Developing an action plan with enough specificity to guide the data collection process, the organization of data, time for sharing, and time for reflections on actions and refinements, include timelines and identify responsible parties.

Difficulties Related to Building a Learning Community. From our studies, which appear to fit with the work of others who study similar problems, we have developed two principles that we use to guide our current efforts:

1. Action research is an innovation and it has to be learned.

2. In most places, the norms of the school culture need to change; they can begin to change through experiencing collective action research.

When conducting action research, school faculties engage in the collection and analysis of data to help select and clarify goals, select procedures, and study progress in terms of effects on students, teachers, administrators, and parents and other community members. Developing accurate assessment of collectively established goals pushes a school faculty to conceptualize what is worth accomplishing through curriculum, staff development, or instruction. Continuous study of the behavior, attitudes, and knowledge desired by the school community can serve to clarify emerging goals and help shape plans toward optimum possibilities for school improvement.

We stress the value of having all actors in the school community (parents, students, teachers, administrators, and central office) engaged in information seeking and empirical problem solving aimed at making their world--from student life at the classroom table, to classroom instruction, to the school schedule--a healthier place, socially, intellectually, and physically. The value of modeling lifelong learning and problem solving in the professional environment in which one has chosen to live supports personal, professional growth (Dewey, 1904; Gardner, 1963; O'Houle, 1980; and Schon, 1983) and provides continuous demonstrations of these critical life processes for students.

Yet, the new behaviors and skills required for collecting and organizing schoolwide data and publicly sharing the results has strained some school social systems and worked to inhibit instead of foster collegiality. It is one thing to ask a teacher to serve as researcher in his/her own classroom and use the experience garnered to improve private practice; it is something else to ask all on-site to marshall their action in support of common goals, regularly monitor progress on these goals, publicly share results, and redirect/modify actions individually, as a grade level unit, or as a school based on assessment of effects.

Using current data to regularly monitor our students' progress or to examine the implementation of a new curriculum makes great good sense in our pragmatic, information-driven culture, yet for some reason this monitoring remains primarily a private task for each teacher. Yet, by keeping how successfully students are negotiating their school environment an individual teacher's concern and in keeping secret from our colleagues the direct results of instruction and instructional innovations, we isolate both ourselves and our students from the nurturance and support, both technical and social, available within our professional learning community, and we deny ourselves and our colleagues the experience of legitimate collective celebration of common goals.

As we modulate from the current, comfortable-because-they-are-known habits of interaction we have developed with each other, with students, and with community members to collegial, problem-solving interaction focused on collecting and using information for the common good, turmoil, commotion, and passive resistance may erupt among us. This brouhaha can be expected when we disturb workplace norms and begin serious collective study of the effects of selected actions on students and on ourselves. Modifications in how we spend our work hours are often required along with new patterns of interpersonal behavior. Both the modifications themselves and the discomfort attendant to learning new patterns of behavior may generate anxiety in ourselves and our colleagues--regardless of anyone's role designation as official or unofficial leader. However, belief in our professional efficacy and in Dewey's "learning by doing" approach can help us weather the organizational turmoil and evolve healthier norms of professional interaction.

We offer the three items listed below as critical ones for discussion by school faculties and support persons from any organization interested in using schoolwide action research to build a learning community:

1) Recognizing that for school renewal to occur, something different happens: either a redirection of action or the acquisition of new knowledge and skills (learning);

2) Changing the operational belief that something external to individual change will improve student learning;

3) Recognizing that when school teams move forward with schoolwide action research focused on student learning, role relationships change between teachers and between teachers and students and between teachers and administrators; such changes can be difficult.

Reflections

The League is aware that collective inquiry focused on student learning is tough work for schools. Schools sometimes take one to three years in planning without reaching a point of collective action for improving instruction. Why is it so difficult to effect changes in the education offered in classrooms across the school? We have evidence from Goodlad (1984), from Sirotnik (1987), from Strusinski (1989), from Taylor and Teddlie (1992), and from Muncey and McQuillan's (1993) five-year study of the Coalition of Essential Schools that changing the teaching-learning interaction is uncommon and difficult work. Numerous other studies provide testimonials to this difficulty. David and Peterson's (1984) study of 32 elementary schools--located in eight states and identified as exemplary for their success in generating school improvement through shared decision-making--found only a few schools implementing instructional changes. The authors hypothesized that any action that infringed on "teacher autonomy" in the classroom was likely to be avoided, with the majority of these schools focusing their schoolwide collective action on student discipline codes and other non-instructional areas. This was true even among those programs that had been in place for several years.

Overall results of the California School Improvement Program (Berman and Gjelten, 1983) were similar--even in this well-funded, long-term, school-based improvement initiative, few schools engaged in instructional change around a collectively valued goal. Rosenholtz (1989) found most schools "stuck" or "almost stuck," with little ability to implement or maintain major instructional innovations. Results of Louis and Miles' national survey of 178 urban high schools that were implementing comprehensive improvement programs and that were showing signs of progress indicate that very few schools were engaging in instructional improvement. A quote from Improving the Urban High School (Louis and Miles, 1990) sharply illustrates the depth of the problem:

> Programs implemented for less than three years show significantly less impact on student achievement, student attendance, teaching methods, new teacher skills, and student-faculty relations than those that have been in place longer.

> [Even] If we look only at those programs that have been implemented for three or more years, the conclusion that effective schools programs have greater impact on the cosmetic and administrative side of schools than on the teaching-learning process and student achievement is almost inescapable.(p.49)

The results of the case studies of five urban high schools designated as "especially promising" in terms of improvement support this same pattern of reluctance to engage in instructional change (Louis and Miles, 1990). In two of these five cases, the comprehensive school improvement plans did not affect "what went on 'behind the classroom door,' but focused more on improving the safety of the school, ensuring that students were actually in attendance, and increasing attention to surface climate issues" (pp. 41-42). Reviewing the 51 improvement themes identified in the five schools over the course of the study indicates that only 6 themes appear to be directly related to instruction.

As we study our schools and listen to Fullan and Miles (1992), Huberman (1992), Huberman and Miles (1986), Miles (1992), we know the value of cross-role leadership, the necessity of arranging time for collaborative/collective work, the need for routines to ensure regular discussion and problem-solving meetings, and the need for technical assistance to support major change efforts.

As we consider future policy issues and seek to move forward through action research, now that the League of Professional Schools is entering its fourth year of operation with sixty schools devoted to long term school renewal, what can be said about the implementation and implications of action research?

First, it is clear that there has been **progress in schools seeing the need to conduct action research**.

Second, there are **relatively few schools, one-fourth, that are systematically going about the process of assessing student learning to inform future school decisions.**

Third, there **are practitioners who are conducting schoolwide action research** in League schools, and they will provide future directions, facilitation, and resources to assist other schools. They, in turn, will need external assistance and expertise from others.

Fourth, **most schools need a structure and process for conducting action research, need to identify internal action research coordinators, and need to build in release time or re-allocated responsibilities** for getting the work done.

What also is apparent is that **in conceiving the League and its three premises, a value-driven initial focus on democratic, professional decision-making over education made action research less important for schools to implement at the beginning**. It is easy to speculate that if the League had begun with planning workshops on identifying important educational concerns and developing plans for conducting action research, schools might be much further along. However, a conscious decision was made to initially emphasize involvement, participation, and equality in making decisions about school work.

This last point needs emphasis. There are many entry points to improving schools. Different reformers place priority on staff development, curriculum redesign, core principles of learning, reorganization of schedules, etc. The League was created in a state which was noted for reform being legislated, regulated, standardized, and monitored. In the era of legislated learning, many local educators felt disenfranchised and powerless. Conditions in the state since (and partially as a result of the work of the League) have changed dramatically. But at that time, the notion of faculty as decision maker in schools was rare. Furthermore, the idea of faculty as assessors of their own schoolwide efforts was even rarer. Data collection with the school as a unit was clearly a state function monitored and controlled through district policies.

The founder of the League has kept consistent that democratic governance, educational focus, and action research were integral dimensions of renewing education. Since the major purpose of public schools is to prepare students to engage proactively in a democracy, adults had to first show by their actions and decisions their belief in democracy as a way of life. To say it another way, democracies to endure must have a "covenant" of educational principles and values, a congruent "charter" of decision making to activate these principles and values, and a "critical study process" of action research to further inform decisions (Glickman, 1993). In that context, to begin with governance and educational focus made sense, but now the focus has shifted to the third dimension.

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APPENDIX

So, what has been done to help these League schools collect and use data for school improvement? Here is a brief description of key activities and resources provided by the League to support school-based action research. School, district office, or university personnel considering schoolwide action research or collective inquiry as an avenue to school renewal, may find these "findings" of interest.

Support for Action Research 1990-1991

At our first orientation and planning workshop **in January 1990**, we shared three questions school teams should ask themselves about in terms of action research: 1) What data is used? 2) What other data could be used? and 3) What information would help set schoolwide instructional goals. Of the two-day workshop we allocated approximately 30 minutes to an overview of action research and this activity. At their first meeting (**May 1990**) after joining the League, in a 55-minute optional session, to which at least one member of each school team was encouraged to attend, League staff provided school participants with a notebook of data collection instruments and a list of over 100 data sources developed after studying their original action plans. At the first annual conference (**October 1990**), League staff provided three 45-minute optional sessions that related to action research; they ran simultaneously. One session focused on assessing implementation results, lessons from the field, and sharing from schools in terms of what they needed to support their action research efforts. The two other sessions offered were on observation techniques and on interview techniques.

After one year in the League, many schools were not engaging in action research; although virtually every school thought it was a good idea, many school teams were not certain about how or where to start. At this point League staff permitted themselves to bring a little more structure and time to the facilitation. At the **February 1991** meeting, during the optional session on action research, we provided conceptual frameworks to hold on to in thinking about assessing progress on schoolwide initiatives. One figure simply outlined a five-stage cycle--selecting an area of interest, collecting data, organizing data, analyzing and interpreting data, and taking schoolwide action--to guide the action research process; and the other figure depicted data sources to be used in terms of existing readily-available data sources, common conventional data sources, and more creative, elaborate data sources. We also extended the time for this session to two hours. During the first hour, members of three League schools engaging in action research presented their initiatives and data, and during the second hour League staff presented the conceptual frameworks described above.

Support for Action Research 1991-1992

New schools attended their first Spring Planning Meeting in **May 1991**. We made two major changes from our first Spring Planning Meeting in May of 1990: we increased the time dedicated to the optional breakout session on action research from 55 minutes to 90 minutes; and individuals from six schools (three presenting each day) that were making steady progress in action research presented as part of the session. The content of the session included presentation of a conceptual framework for action research, the three school presentations, and the dissemination of the Action Research Notebook of data collection instruments as described above in May 1990.

Second year schools had a separate planning meeting. At this meeting, there was a two-hour optional session on action research. The focus was on assessing progress on schoolwide initiatives. The content of the meeting included a presentation of assessing progress on the attainment of collective goals and assessing implementation of actions identified to support these goals and presentations by three schools. As usual, presenters provided brief written descriptions of action research in their school, copies of the forms they were using to collect data, and examples of how they had organized their information.

Based on the action plans of the second year League schools, the questions that were being asked, the types of assistance requested via telephone, the extent of schoolwide action research occurring, and discussions with teachers and administrators about what assistance was needed, persons who attended the one-hour optional session on action research at the second annual League conference in **October 1991** received an outline of activities and points to consider developed from the action research cycle and a narrative description of the action research process. Responses from regular participants included things such as these: "I'm finally beginning to see what we can do. I'm beginning to understand. We could not hear what you were saying last year, but now it makes sense. I wish we had collected baseline data on our initiative."

The focus of this two-day conference in October, 1991, was student learning, with a primary emphasis on alternative assessments. One reason for this emphasis was to help schools move beyond standardized test scores as sole data sources into conventional and creative data sources such as student interviews, products, projects, videotapes, etc.

Based on school requests and staff assessment of need, a five-hour workshop on action research was offered as an optional service in **February 1992**. Two hours of this time was used to describe the phases of the action research cycle and to develop a rationale for using action research as part of one's school improvement efforts. One-half hour was

used for across-school sharing in groups; two hours for school teams to work on their data or action research plans with League staff help; and one-half hour on a review of implementation tips.

Support for Action Research 1992-1993

Based on the data gathered from the current 60 League schools, representing 37 school districts in Georgia, schoolwide action research has been difficult to implement without the acquisition of knowledge and new skills and a plan for implementation. Action research is becoming an integral part of the decision-making process in nearly quarter of our member schools. Another quarter of member schools recognize the value of action research and have begun to use it to some extent. The remainder of the schools are just in the beginning phases of the process, and some have not begun to use action research to study student learning. This information indicated that although action research is one of the three central premises of the League, and has been addressed through a number of optional sessions and through feedback to schools about their progress in action research through the facilitator letters and visits, a more comprehensive and systematic approach is necessary if schoolwide action research is to affect decisions made and actions taken in member schools.

In **November of 1992**, teachers from eleven League schools, representing six school districts, met with League staff members to plan how they could facilitate action research within the League. A decision was made to have a group of teachers and principals working in League schools that have had successful experiences with action research train themselves collaboratively to act as action research facilitators to other schools. This group will be called the Action Research Consortium. This group will develop itself, call upon experts, and eventually form a cadre of action research facilitators to assist other schools and in time grow in numbers. Currently, League schools may call on the Consortium, at no expense, for a range of services. For example, a presentation introducing the school staff to action research, assistance with methods of data collection, assistance with the organization and presentation of data.

The theme of the **February 1993** meeting was action research. During this meeting, League schools were introduced to the Action Research Consortium described above and to the services that members of the Consortium would provide.

For the first time ever, at a regular meeting of the League of Professional schools, sessions on action research were conducted as part of the general session for all participants. Previous to this date, the only time the topic had been the focus for a general session had been at the Orientation and Planning Workshop prior to a

school's affiliation with the League. In sharp contrast to the theory, description, and process presentations conducted to build knowledge and application of shared governance within the school, the study of schoolwide action research had remained an optional session or an optional meeting for three years. While League staff encouraged members of school teams to divide their attendance among sessions being conducted at each meeting, there had been no structured time to bring the League participants as a learning community to the same level of understanding as they were acquiring in shared governance.

During the afternoon, nine 45-minute breakout sessions were conducted on action research. The content of these sessions ranged from an introduction to action research; to organizing for action research; to organizing and analyzing data; to individual teacher research in the classroom; to informal conversations about schoolwide action research; to sessions that described action research being conducted at one elementary school, in one middle school, and in one high school.

Is the League, through its decisions about areas of emphasis in terms of time and discussion and through its scheduling of optional sessions, in part, responsible for the current status of action research in League schools? Is action research simply more difficult to implement than shared decision making and instructional focus? Are school cultures less receptive to data collection and use than they are to the other two League goals? The answer to each of these questions is probably "in part, yes."

We--League staff members and associates and members of the Congress which governs the actions of the League--will continue to study the implementation of action research in member schools and its effectiveness for enhancing student learning. More meeting time devoted to action research, more presentations by League schools, and more technical assistance provided to schools may help action research become an integral part of school life in more member schools.